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Sri Ramakrishna:

The Initiator of Integral Yoga

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Journal of Integral Studies.

Sri Aurobindo, by virtue of integrating all the past systems of yoga before him named his Yoga Integral Yoga or *Purnayoga*. A study of Sri Ramakrishna suggests that he had initiated this integration, which found its fruition, culmination and completeness through Sri Aurobindo. The objective of the author is to demonstrate that Integral Yoga was nurtured initially in the loving hands of Sri Ramakrishna whereas it blossomed through the guidance, supervision and the *sadhana* of Sri Aurobindo. One finds that some of the ideas of the Integral Yoga were inchoate and nebulous in the experiences of Sri Ramakrishna before Sri Aurobindo incarnated and formalized and canonized the entire literature of Integral Yoga to suit the demands of the present times, and for the times to come. The author's intention is not to credit Sri Ramakrishna as a propounder of Integral Yoga but to highlight the fact that in the greater cosmic plan, one can see the gleaming of a movement towards the emergence of Integral Yoga in his teachings. Also it is the author's understanding that Sri Aurobindo went far beyond Sri Ramakrishna as far as the vision of Integral Truth is concerned, but this should not undermine the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna in any way.

Before discussing the contribution of Sri Ramakrishna, let us examine the central tenets of Integral Yoga as enunciated by Sri Aurobindo, which will serve as a background to advance the above stated contention.

The Central Tenets of Integral Yoga

1. Integral Yoga is a synthesis of different schools of Vedanta: Vedanta literally translated means the end of the Vedas and it comprises Upanishads, Brahmasutras, Bhagavat Gita, Shrutis and Smritis. There are many types of Vedanta namely *Kewaladwaita* or Nondualist, *Visishtadwaita* or Qualified Nondualist, *Dwaitadwaita* or Dual-nondualist and *Dwaita* or Dualist. Shankaracharya was the propounder of the Nondualist school and stated that the Brahman is the Ultimate Reality which in effect is formless, indeterminable and ineffable. In other words, he emphasized what is called the *nirguna* aspect of the Reality. He further maintained that Brahman alone is real and that the world is unreal or *mithya*. Shankara's influence has been so overarching on the Indian system of thought that Vedanta is normally identified with him only, somewhat to the neglect of the other vedantic mystic-philosophers. He rejected the notion of Personal God or *Ishvara* and totally discounted the existence of the *saguna* aspect of Brahman.

Ramanuja, who was the exponent of *Visishtadwaita*, stressed the

saguna aspect of the Brahman stating that the Ultimate Reality is an 'all comprehensive spirit which is qualified by inconscient Nature and finite spirits which are adjectival to the former'(Chaudhuri, 1951, p. 204). He focussed on the world, self and God and they were all real for him. Ramanuja proposed his theory after four hundred years of Shankara, which has led to heated debates between the followers of the *nirguna* and the *saguna* facets of Brahman. To make the matters more complicated, Madhavacharya, while advocating *Dwaitavada*, put forth his contention that the all-encompassing Divine and individuals (*jiva*) are separate, and the Divine rules over the *jiva*. One comes to understand that the *Kewaladwaita* emphasized the transcendental aspect of the Divine, *Visishtadwaita* underlined the Cosmic aspect of the Divine whereas *Dwaita* stressed the separate individuals (*jiva*) in relation to the Divine. These major schools of the Vedanta have existed as jarring sects for quite some time in the history of humanity.

Sri Aurobindo, while endorsing the truth of each of these schools has reconciled them into a system of Vedanta which he has named *Purnadvaita*. The apparent contradiction that seems to exist between *saguna* and *nirguna* is harmonized and given a larger and more comprehensive picture. According to him, the Brahman is transcendent, ineffable, indeterminable in Its transcendental spirit; is *Ishvara* in Its cosmic existence and manifests Itself as individual entities in terrestrial existence. Hence, all that exists is Brahman and nothing else. The all encompassing Divine is capable of existing as One-in-many and Many-in-one simultaneously. *Kewaladwaita*, *Visishtadwaita* and *Dwaita* are all true, but the error occurs when these schools emphasize their own truth alone to the neglect of the other. It is by the power of self-determination that the Brahman manifests itself as *Visishtadwaita* and *Dwaita*. Hence the Ultimate Truth as captured by *Adwaita*, *Visishtadwaita* and *Dwaita* exist simultaneously. Sri Aurobindo writes:

In a realistic Adwaita there is no need to regard the Saguna as a creation from the Nirguna or even secondary or subordinate to it: both are equal aspects of one Reality, its position of silent status and rest and its position of action and dynamic force; a silence of eternal rest and peace supports an eternal action and movement. The one Reality, the Divine Being, is bound by neither, since it is in no way limited; it possesses both. There is no incompatibility between the two, as there is none between the many and the one, the sameness and the difference. (Sri Aurobindo, 1958, p. 46)

2. Integral Yoga is an integration of Vedanta and Tantra: Vedanta, particularly *Visishtadwaita* and *Dwaita* speaks about the lord who is the ruler of the universe. When translated into Sankhya, this lord as the Master of the universe is the Purusha. But seen from the perspective of Tantra, it is Prakriti or Nature or Shakti which is the executive power behind the each and every working of the worlds visible and cryptic. Vedanta and Tantra observed from these two positions seem to be irreconcilable but Sri Aurobindo, who formulated his yoga based on his own experience, says that Vedanta and Tantra have captured partial truths and the fusion of these two streams of yoga gives the complete picture. Whereas by following Vedanta the seeker comes to the inactive and the silent Purusha, by practicing Tantra one realizes the dynamic and the executive Shakti which is considered to be feminine in nature. Explaining the intricacies of his realization, he writes:

[In] the integral conception, the Conscious Soul is the Lord, the Nature soul is his executive energy. Purusha is of the nature of Sat, conscious self-existence pure and infinite; Shakti or Prakriti is of the nature of Chit,--it is power of the Purusha's self-conscious existence, pure and infinite. The relation between the two exists between the poles of rest and action. When the Energy is absorbed in the bliss of conscious self-existence, there is rest ; when the Purusha pours itself out in the action of its Energy, there is action, creation and the enjoyment or Ananda of becoming. (Sri Aurobindo, 1955, p. 36)

One might feel that the way Sri Aurobindo harmonizes *nirguna* and *saguna*, he is probably using the same principle to reconcile Tantra and Vedanta. The author would like to furnish certain clarifications at this juncture. First, it must be clear by now that *saguna* and *nirguna* respectively denote the personal and the impersonal aspect of the Divine, and *saguna* comprises all gods and goddesses active in the world. In the cosmic existence as the Puranas suggest, most of these gods have goddesses as consorts, for example Shiva is the husband of Parvati and Sachi is the wife of Vishnu. These goddesses who are the different aspects of the Shakti are overtly active in the world with the gods behind giving support and ascent to the workings of the Prakriti. So the gods represent the silent and inactive Brahman whereas the goddesses are the active operators in the creation. These gods are basically passive in their activity. Hence, we see that Sri Aurobindo not only reconciles the different threads of Vedanta but also unifies Vedanta with Tantra. Therefore, 'together, the Vedantic and the Tantric truth unified, can arrive at the integral knowledge.'(Sri

Aurobindo, 1958, p. 39).

3. Integral Yoga is the integration of the World with the Beyond: With the advent of Buddha the world came to be seen as a place of suffering and as a natural concomitance to his preaching of Nirvana, the spiritual practice in India began to assume a world-negating character. Shankara with his Vedantic teaching of *Mayavada* endorsed the other-worldly philosophy in India as a consequence of which, the world came to be viewed as an outcome of *Maya* or illusion (*Jaganmithya*). Sri Aurobindo while affirming his realization of the transcendental Brahman refutes the idea of the world as an illusion and states that a seeker of Integral Yoga not only strives for a static release in the Brahman but also aspires for a transformation of life, mind and body, and the conditions on the earth. An integral yogi manifests the workings of the Divine Shakti on the earth in order to overrule the workings of lower Nature, which maintains the rule of darkness, ignorance, suffering, poverty and pain. A divine life here on earth with full and active participation with the dynamic Divine or the Supramental Truth-Consciousness is the goal of Integral yoga and not mere liberation from the grip of *Maya* or from the recurring knot of Karma.

4. Integral Yoga warrants liberation in and of nature rather than from nature: With the decline of the Golden age of the Vedas and Upanishads, Yoga under the proclamation of Buddha and Shankara came to be signified as liberation from nature rather than of and in nature (Chaudhuri, 1951). Nature and body were seen as a stumbling block in the process of the self-realization and were viewed as a ladder to attain the goal only to be discarded when the objective was attained. What was emphasized by these two schools and subsequently by other Vedantic schools was transcendental liberation or *mukti*. Shakti, which is the executive force behind all the happenings of the universe, consists of the higher called the *para* Prakriti and the lower known as the *apara* Prakriti. The yoga of liberation highlights the process of release from the fetters of lower Prakriti but fails to address the transmutation of the lower nature into the higher in order to make the life, body and mind an impeccable and perfect instrument of the working of the *para* Prakriti. Release from the clutches of the lower Prakriti is the first step in Integral Yoga; the next is to bring the glories of the spirit not only into life and mind but also into the cells of the body in order to immortalize it. The objective of Integral Yoga is to divinize the matter too, a theme which is unique to this system. An integral yogi is not supposed to remain fixed in the summits of transcendental realization but to pull down the spiritual force for its fuller manifestation in the world. Ascent and descent are the two-fold

principle of Integral yoga, represented by Sri Aurobindo's symbol, which consists of two triangles -- one pointed upwards and the other projecting downwards. A complete transformation of the body, which he referred to as Supramentalization, is the ultimate aim in the Integral Yoga.

At the same time, there is a shift too from concentration on individual realization to collective realization. As opposed to the earlier systems of yoga, which focus on individual perfection, Sri Aurobindo spells out a system which concentrates on the perfection of the human race or collective perfection -- a total and complete manifestation of the Supramental Truth on the earth and in the body.

5.Integral Yoga is where East meets West: Even if we allow the stereotypes to dominate our thinking, it would be safe to generalize that the West values a culture which places a premium on individuality and the East supports a culture which fosters collectivity -- it honored individuality only when self-realization was in question; otherwise, even in the present times, it simply creates a social system where an individual has to fuse himself or herself in the sea of collectivity. From an integral perspective, we are in the process of evolving a society which respects the individual line of growth and values co-existence with other members in a spirit of cooperation, harmony and love in contradistinction to the present state of affairs in the East and the West where one needs to be sacrificed at the altar of the other.

For the past few centuries, there has been a materialist denial in the West negating everything spiritual or subtle as hallucination in the name of science. Things that are visible with the help of corporeal or physical senses were considered as the valid subject matter of research and science; others were rejected either as superstition or not worth consideration. This identification with matter gave the West an opportunity to construct a grand material civilization probably unheard of in the past. Reason and intellect were regarded as supreme and a panacea of all ills. The result of all this was that in the West, there has been a development of science and political organization at the cost of spiritual life. In the middle of its affluence, it suffered two world wars which shook the very foundation of its material living. Despite its wealth it could not establish a society where people could live happily and harmoniously.

On the other hand, for the past many centuries in India and in the East, there has been a denial of matter and life in this world which has led to the neglect of the activities on the earth. The best minds were engaged in their self-realization and after having attained that, were

involved with helping others to realize their own achievement. The outcome has been a continual invasion from barbarians who had scant regard for a society submerged in religious and spiritual practices. There was a decline in political and social life, as a consequence of which there has been widespread illiteracy, disease, exploitation, suffering and poverty. Thus we see that spirit and matter were considered as diametrically opposite poles in the East and the West and it was supposed that the two shall never meet.

Sri Aurobindo came to correct this error. He regards both the materialist denial and the ascetic refusal as incorrect and states that spirit and matter are two ends of a spectrum, and thus the two are not mutually exclusive. For a complete and divine life, he envisions a spiritual life which honors and incorporates material life. In his larger vision, science and mysticism are not opposed to each other but are engaged in a harmonious wedlock. The synthesis of the material development of the West with the spiritual progress of the East is his clarion call for mankind.

6. Integral Yoga is the synthesis of all yogas: The history of India has been a witness to many forms of yoga since there are many ways of seeking union with the Divine. Hathayoga uses the body and Rajayoga focuses on the mental being. Jnanayoga's method is union through knowledge while Bhaktiyoga concentrates on devotion and Karmayoga emphasizes liberation through work. In the past all these systems of yoga, while propounding their own method underplayed the truths of the other yogas. This may have been done in accordance with the demand of the times and in conformity with the larger Divine Will. But for the contemporary age, Sri Aurobindo synthesizes these different systems of yoga in which the systems contribute and retain their unique and characteristic features and, yet the synthesis assumes a separate and distinct identity. Since the nature of the paper does not permit the author to go into the details, may it suffice to say that Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga synthesizes Hathayoga, Rajayoga, Jnanayoga, Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga (see Sri Aurobindo 1940/96 for details).

Through his integral vision, he brings together the life, mind and body in Yoga. Most of these earlier yogas regarded the body -- which is a manifestation of Nature -- to be an obstacle in the realization of the Divine and hence aimed at its purification in order to attain the Divine, only to be discarded when the objective was attained. Sri Aurobindo gives a fillip to this widely accepted practice by pronouncing that, in his scheme of Integral Yoga, the body is to be perfected in order to make it a flawless instrument of the Divine. Also in the earlier systems, the nervous and the vital energies were meant

to be rejected and annulled. Recognizing that they are obstacles on the path, Sri Aurobindo calls for purification and transformation of these forces. Similarly he prescribed that a seeker should perfect one's mind before transcending it -- mind is regarded as another major impediment on the path of Yoga -- so that there is no distortion when the higher forces begin to use it for a divine purpose. Thus we see that the purification or *shuddhi* of life, mind and body was the concern of Sri Aurobindo but at the same time there was no recoil from the power or *siddhi* that may come to the seeker unlike many systems where *siddhi* was seen as a major threat to the yogic life. Also a major focus of the previous yogas was a separation of Purusha from Prakriti so that the seeker could be established in the blissful state of *Kaivalya* or Nirvana or transcendental self-realization. But the objective in Integral Yoga is not self-realization or *mukti* alone but *bhukti* as well which means a freer participation with the Divine Will here on the earth. Sri Aurobindo, together with synthesizing different schools of yoga, also reconciles and unifies *shuddhi* and *siddhi*, and *mukti* and *bhukti*.

7. Integral Yoga considers all religions to be the manifestation of one Integral Truth: Sri Aurobindo states that between the ordinary human mind and the highest Supermind, there are many planes of existence; for example the Intuitive mind, the Illumined mind, the Higher mind and the Overmind. These levels correspond to different planes of spiritual truths and every religion has been propounded from a particular plane of existence and hence all are true. It is at the level of the Overmind that the separation of one single Truth -- which is united in the Supermind -- into many truths begins to take place, the vision of which in exclusion to the others gives birth to conflicting religions. But all these conflicting ideas and philosophies find their reconciliation at the level of the Supermind. In other words, in the all-encompassing vision of Sri Aurobindo, all religions emanate from one single source and all are different facets of one Integral Truth.

Having briefly outlined the central ideas of Integral Yoga let us examine the teachings and realizations of Sri Ramakrishna in order to see how he laid the foundation of Integral Yoga. The next sections will include references to both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, known as Narendranath Dutta before he became a monk. The reason for this is, because in the understanding of the author, Vivekananda does not differ from his master at all. There are two reasons for saying this; first, the great saint passed all his powers to Vivekananda before leaving his body. While writing the biography of Swami Vivekananda, his disciples (1979) commented:

It was only three or four days before the Master's

Mahasamadhi. Shri Ramakrishna called Naren to him. Looking steadfastly at him he entered into deep meditation. Naren felt as though a subtle force, resembling an electric shock, were entering his body. He lost outer consciousness. When he came to, he found the Master weeping. Wondering, Naren asked him why he wept, he was told, "O Naren, today I have given you my all and become a Fakir, a penniless beggar. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that you will go where you came from." (p. 182).

Secondly, the Holy mother -- the wife of Sri Ramakrishna -- after his passing away saw his subtle body enter Swami Vivekananda. Regarding this vision, the disciples of Vivekananda (1979) wrote:

....she had a vision regarding him after the passing away of the Master, in which she saw the form of Shri Ramakrishna entering into the body of Narendra, signifying that the Master would thenceforth work in and through his chief disciple (p. 383).

The Realizations and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna

1.Unity of all religions and sects: The first stepping stone of Sri Ramakrishna's realizations was the vision of the Mother-goddess Kali, whom he evoked as her devotee at a temple in Dakshineshwara, a place five miles north of Kolkata. As a result of her long history of spiritual and religious practices, India has numerous sects within the larger framework of Hinduism, for example Shaivas or the worshippers of Shiva, Vaishnavas or the worshippers of Vishnu, Shaktas or the worshippers of the Mother etc., etc. Sri Ramakrishna, after having had the realization of the Divine Mother, began experimenting with the other sects and religions in order to see where their practices led. The details of his spiritual realizations have been documented by one of his disciples Mahendranath Gupta, which were based on the conversations that he had with the people who came to visit him.

He first worshipped Lord Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, as the monkey god Hanuman, who is considered to be the epitome in devotion in Indian mythology. He received the blessings of Sita, the divine consort of Rama who appeared to him in vision and disappeared into his body. Shortly afterwards, he was visited by a Brahmin woman named Brahmani, who was well versed with the Vaishnava and the Tantrik modes of worship. Within three days, he

realized the essence of the teachings of Tantra -- received vision of the divine Maya by virtue of which the world comes into play and by which mankind is deluded into thinking that it is separate from God; acquired the eight supernatural powers called the *siddhis*; and experienced and literally saw the awakening and rising of the Kundalini Shakti (for details see M., 1942).

The next experiment was with the disciplines of Vaishnavism. The Vaishnavas follow the Bhaktiyoga or the path of union with the Divine through love and devotion. He was visited by a wandering ascetic whose deity was a metal image of Rama as a child, whom he affectionately called as *Ramlala*. By worshipping *Ramlala*, Sri Ramkrishna had the vision of Lord Rama pervading the universe as Spirit and Consciousness; as the Creator, Sustainer and the Destroyer of the universe as well as the transcendental Brahman without form, attribute and name. The next to be realized was Sri Krishna, who is another incarnation of Vishnu. But in order to realize Sri Krishna, the propitiation of Radha - his consort - was imperative according to the Vaishnavas. Very soon he was blessed with a vision of Radha, who disappeared into his body. Shortly afterwards he realized Krishna and became one with him.

He further wanted to ascertain the truth of Vedanta -- the non-dualist philosophy which describes Ultimate reality as Brahman also referred to as Satchidananda, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. With the assistance of a Vedantic teacher by the name of Totapuri, Sri Ramakrishna transcended all dualities and relativities of the world in order to experience the truths of Vedanta.

Having realized the unity of all sects within Hinduism, Ramakrishna turned his attention towards other dominant religions of the world namely, Islam and Christianity. He took the initiation from a Muslim guru and began to live like a devout Muslim. He gave up all Hindu gods and goddesses and went to live outside the temple campus. He had the vision of Mohammed, the Prophet who disappeared into him. Immediately after, he had the experience of the Ineffable and featureless Brahman. Similarly, on becoming interested in Christianity, he had the vision of Christ, who merged into him while a divine voice rang out saying that Jesus was a divine incarnation who suffered for the love of mankind; and is in eternal union with God. He summed up his realizations as follows:

I have practiced all religions-Hinduism, Islam, Christianity-and I have also followed the paths of different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God toward whom all are directing their steps, though along

different paths....Wherever I look, I see men quarreling in the name of religion--Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmos, Vaishnavas, and the rest. But they never reflect that He who is called Krishna is also called Siva, and bears the name of the Primal energy, Jesus, and Allah as well--the same Rama with a thousand names. A lake has several ghats (*banks*). At one the Hindus take water in pitchers and call it 'jal'; at another the Mussalmans take water in leather bags and call it 'pani'. At a third the Christians call it 'water'. Can we imagine that it is not 'jal' but only 'pani' or 'water'? How ridiculous! The substance is One under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament, and name create differences.[Cited in M., 1942, p. 35, italics mine]

Describing the multifacetedness of God, Ramakrishna states:

Once some blind men chanced to come near an animal that someone told them was an elephant. They were asked what the elephant was like. The blind men began to feel its body. One of them said that the elephant was like a pillar; he had touched only its leg. Another said that it was like a winnowing-fan; he had touched only its ear. In this way the others, having touched its tail or belly, gave different versions of the elephant. Just so, a man who has seen only one aspect of God limits God to that alone. It is his conviction that God cannot be anything else.[Cited in M.,1942, p. 191]

Emphasizing the unity of all religions, he further alludes:

Each religion is only a path leading to God, as rivers come from different directions and ultimately become one in the one ocean. The Truth established in the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantra is but one Satchidananda. In the Vedas It is called Brahman, in the Puranas It is called Krishna, Rama and so on, and in the Tantras It is called Shiva. The one Satchidananda is called Brahman, Krishna, and Siva. [Cited in M.,1942, p. 265]

2. Synthesis of Vedanta and Tantra: As previously noted, one of the definitions of Integral Yoga is the union of Vedanta and Tantra. Sri Ramakrishna experientially realized their unity. By virtue of Brahmani's instructions, he realized the truths of Tantra and with the aid of Totapuri, he attained the Vedantic truths. Moreover, after his Vedantic realization he fluctuated between the vision of the Divine

Mother and Brahman. Like Sri Aurobindo, he considered both Shakti and Brahman to be identical. He explains:

The Brahman and Shakti are identical. If you accept the one, you must accept the other. It is like fire and its power to burn. If you see the fire, you must recognize its power to burn also. You cannot think of fire without its power to burn, nor can you think of the power to burn without fire. You cannot conceive of the sun's rays without the sun, nor can you conceive of the sun without its rays. What is milk like? Oh, you say, it is something white. You cannot think of the milk without the whiteness, and again, you cannot think of whiteness without the milk. Thus one cannot think of Brahman without Shakti, or of Shakti without Brahman. One cannot think of the Absolute without the Relative, or of the Relative without the Absolute. The Primordial Power is ever at play. She is creating, preserving and destroying in the play, as it were. This power is called Kali. Kali is verily Brahman, and Brahman is verily Kali. It is one and the same Reality. When we think of It as inactive, that is to say, not engaged in the acts of creation, preservation, and destruction, then we call It Brahman. But when It engages in these activities, then we call It Kali or Shakti. The Reality is one and the same; the difference is in name and form. [Cited in M.,1942, pp. 134-35]

The Primordial Power and the Supreme Brahman are identical. You can never think of the one without the other. They are like the gem and its brilliance. One cannot think of the brilliance without the gem, or of the gem without its brilliance. Again, it is like snake and its wriggling motion. One cannot think of the wriggling motion without the snake, or of the snake without its wriggling motion....These are two aspects of Reality: Purusha and Prakriti. He who is the Purusha is also Prakriti. Both are the embodiment of Bliss.[Cited in M.,1942, pp. 320-21]

3. Synthesis of impersonal and personal or *nirguna* and *saguna*: As noted previously, there were a lot of misgivings between followers of the *saguna* and *nirguna* aspects of Reality and it has also been noted how Sri Aurobindo reconciled the two. Sri Ramakrishna also had effected the synthesis. He regarded form and formless as manifestations of the same Reality and held that one gets the vision of

the transcendental Brahman in *nirvikalpa samadhi* and the vision of Brahman with form as gods and goddesses in *savikalpa samadhi* or *bhava samadhi*. At the same time, he also maintained that the Brahman is beyond form and formlessness and cannot be limited. As a matter of fact, he prescribed meditation on God with form to the followers of formless God. To a monk of the Nanak sect, which believes in the existence of the formless God, he said:

Dive deep; one does not get the precious gems by merely floating on the surface. God is without form, no doubt; but He also has form. By meditating on God with form one speedily acquires devotion; then one can meditate on the formless God. It is like throwing a letter away, after learning its contents, and then setting out to follow its instructions.[Cited in M.,1942, p. 353]

Again while solving this mystery of God with form and formless God, he declared :

No one can say with finality that God is only 'this' and nothing else. He is formless, and again He has forms. For the bhakta He assumes forms. But He is formless for the jnani, that is, for him who looks on the world as a mere dream. The bhakta feels that he is one entity and the world another. Therefore God reveals Himself to him as a Person. But the jnani--the Vedantist, for instance--always reasons, applying the process of 'Not this, not this'. Through this discrimination he realizes, by his inner perception, that the ego and the universe are both illusory, like a dream. Then the jnani realizes Brahman in his own consciousness. He cannot describe what Brahman is.....Think of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence, as it were, of the bhakta's love, the water has frozen at places into blocks of ice. In other words, God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a Person. But with the rising of the sun of knowledge, the blocks of ice melt. Then one doesn't feel any more that God is a Person, nor does one see God's forms.[Cited in M.,1942, p. 148]

It was his view that just as water in lake or ocean appears blue but becomes colorless when one approaches it and takes the water in the palm, from afar the Divine has a form but when one establishes a close communion with It, the form disappears. Just as fire has no shape, its flames give it a form; similarly the formless God assumes

different forms.

He too reconciled *Adwaitavada*, *Visishtadwaitavada* and *Dwaitavada* stating that the truths captured by these systems are different stages in the seeker's gradual self-realization and spiritual unfoldment. One sees a kind of similarity here with Sri Aurobindo's exposition regarding the existence of different levels of spiritual truths between the ordinary human mind and the Supermind.

4. All systems of Yoga lead to the same realization: Though Sri Ramakrishna did not synthesize the different strains of yoga by taking the essential components of all the different yogas and knitting them into a whole which could be more than the sum of its parts in the way Sri Aurobindo did, he nevertheless made an essential contribution by stating that there is no incompatibility between the different systems of yoga as far as the ultimate result of spiritual realization is concerned. Whether it is Jnanayoga or Bhaktiyoga or Karmayoga, the seeker knows the same truth. While prescribing Bhaktiyoga as the ideal yoga for his times, he states:

Bhaktiyoga is the religion for this age. But that does not mean that the lover of God will reach one goal and the philosopher and worker another. It means that if a person seeks the the Knowledge of Brahman he can attain It by following the path of bhakti, too. God, who loves His devotee, can give him the Knowledge of Brahman if He so desires.[Cited in M.,1942, p. 468]

Integral Yoga is a synthesis or reconciliation of yogas. Choudhuri (1951), however feels that the word reconciliation may mean either a demonstration of the identity of the goals of different yogas or it may mean creating a new system of yoga which is richer and different and yet inclusive of all the other systems. Sri Aurobindo devised a new system while Sri Ramakrishna showed that all yogas may result in the realization of the same goal, thus making his own contribution towards the evolution of Integral Yoga. This was a very significant development in the sense that Shankara, while placing a special emphasis on the way of knowledge had denounced the path of works in order to discredit the Mimansa school -- one of the six major schools in Indian Philosophy -- and the exposition of Ramanuja, which extolled the virtues of the path of love, had put the path of bhakti at loggerheads with the path of jnana.

5. World is an integral aspect of God and not removed from God: We have already seen how Shankar's and Buddha's philosophy dichotomized spiritual life and worldly life. Shankara had said that

this world is an illusion and an error. Though the full correction of this error was done by Sri Aurobindo when he stated that the objective of Integral Yoga was to fulfill a divine life on earth, it is seen that Sri Ramakrishna had begun making the rectification of the mistake stemming out of the philosophy of Shankara and Buddha despite the fact that he still valued outer renunciation in contradistinction to Sri Aurobindo, who emphasized inner renunciation. Says he,

As long as one has not realized God, one should renounce the world, following the process of 'Neti, neti'. But he who has attained God knows that it is God who has become all this. Then he sees that God, maya, living beings and the universe form one whole. God includes the universe and its living beings....It is the process of evolution and involution. The world, after its dissolution, remains involved in God; and God, at the time of creation, evolves as the world. Butter goes with the buttermilk, and buttermilk goes with butter.[Cited in M.,1942, pp. 327-28]

The issue of serving the humanity in order to see it happy was very close to Swami Vivekananda's heart. In fact, the motto of the Ramkrishna Mission is *Atmano Mokshartham jagaddhitaya ca* (while striving for one's own liberation, the seeker should work for the good of the world). Again, we see that Swami Vivekananda spoke about one's own salvation while serving the world -- and hence makes a beginning of Integral Yoga -- unlike Sri Aurobindo whose concern is the transformation of terrestrial life in an effort of progression towards the Divine and in whose view liberation or *mukti* is only the first step.

6.The meeting of East and West: Sri Ramakrishna did not speak anything as such about bringing the East and the West closer, but Swami Vivekananda, who was educated with a western background, could identify the scientific, technological and political developments of the West. Since he also had the knowledge of the spiritual treasures of India acquired under the guidance of his master Sri Ramakrishna, he could foresee that the marriage of the East and the West would be immensely beneficial to mankind and was hence quite particular about bringing them together. He came to America and toured Europe to spread the message of Vedanta so that the West, in turn could provide India the necessary and sufficient technology for the development of its material conditions. According to him, the West needed India's spiritual wisdom whereas India needed its technological expertise. One world and one humanity which honored plurality was his message.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1886 and 1902 respectively but they had already exerted a strong influence on the life of Sri Aurobindo, who was to become the greatest mystic-philosopher-seer of the present times. He was inspired by them in their subtle bodies as well.

Influence of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda on Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo was very much influenced by the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Talking about their influence on him during his earlier years, he writes:

The other strong intellectual influence that came in India in early life were the sayings of Ramakrishna and the writings and speeches of Vivekananda, but this was a first introduction to Indian spiritual experience and not as philosophy. They did not, however, carry me to the practice of Yoga: their influence was purely mental.(Sri Aurobindo, 1983, p.164)

However, after Sri Aurobindo had the vision of all pervading Sri Krishna when he was in jail undergoing the trial of sedition against the British, Swami Vivekananda came to him in a subtle body -- Swami Vivekananda had already passed away by then -- and gave him some important spiritual instructions. In his own words,

It is a fact that I was hearing constantly the voice of Vivekananda speaking to me for a fortnight in the jail in my solitary meditation and felt his presence...The voice spoke on a special and limited but very important field of spiritual experience and it ceased as soon as it had finished saying all that it had to say on that subject. (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, p.68)

During the early stages of his *sadhana* at Pondicherry, there was a picture of Sri Ramakrishna which decorated the room of Sri Aurobindo suggesting the effect that he must have exerted on him. In fact, Sri Aurobindo had also received messages from Sri Ramakrishna, as his diary entry shows, which indicates that had received some guidance from him after beginning his Yoga. Making references to the three messages that Sri Aurobindo had received from him, he writes :

....the third and last message from Ramakrishna was received. The first message was in Baroda, the

"Aurobindo, mandir karo, mandir karo", & the parable of the snake pravritti devouring herself. The second was given in Shankar Chetti's house soon after the arrival in Pondicherry, & the words are lost, but it was a direction to form the higher being in the lower self coupled with a promise to speak once more when the sadhana was nearing its close. This is the third message (18 Oct 1912)
"Make complete sannyasa of Karma.
Make complete sannyasa of thought.
Make complete sannyasa of feeling.
This is my last utterance." (Sri Aurobindo, 1987, pp. 11-12)

Sri Aurobindo has spoken very highly of Sri Ramakrishna making numerous references to him as Bhagwan. Regarding Ramakrishna as one of the seers of Integral Truth and his synthesis of all sects and religion, he writes:

....in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhans, we see a colossal spiritual capacity, first diving straight to the divine realization, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realization and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge...Its object wasto exemplify in the great and decisive experience of a master-soul the truth, now most necessary to humanity, towards which a world long divided into jarring sects and schools is with difficulty labouring, that all sects are forms and fragments of a single integral truth and all disciplines labour in their different ways towards one supreme experience. (Sri Aurobindo, 1955, p. 34)

Sri Aurobindo is the seer and exponent of the Integral Truth or Eternal Religion called the Sanatan Dharma of the Upanishads and the Vedas. Apart from bringing the Supramental down to the earth in order to facilitate the plan of kingdom of heaven on earth, he also came to restate and reiterate the truths of Upanishads and Vedas. He came to restore the pride of a wounded civilization which had taken itself to great heights in the past, and also to harmonize all religion, philosophy and science under the overarching cover of Integral Yoga and Integral Vedanta or *Purnadwaita*. He came to put the seal of spirituality onto the over-emphasized material obsession of mankind. He completed what Sri Ramakrishna had begun. If the reader thinks that the author is reading too much into the connection between Sri Aurobindo and Sri Ramakrishna, the author would like to draw

attention to what Sri Aurobindo has to say in this matter. In his own words :

It is she (*India*) who must send forth from herself, the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal religion which is to harmonize all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul.....It was to initiate this great work, the greatest and most wonderful work ever given to a race, that Bhagwan Ramakrishna came and Vivekananda preached. (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, p. 66, italics mine)

When scepticism had reached its height, the time had come for spirituality to assert itself and establish the reality of the world as the manifestation of the spirit, the secret of the confusion created by the senses, the magnificent possibilities of man and the ineffable beatitude of God. This is the work Sri Ramakrishna came to begin and all the development of the previous two thousand years and more since Buddha appeared, has been a preparation for the harmonisation of spiritual teaching and experience by the Avatar of Dakshineswar.

The long ages of discipline which India underwent are now drawing to an end. A great light is dawning in the East, a light whose heralding glimpses are already seen on the horizon; a new day is about to break, so glorious that even the last of the avatars cannot be sufficient to explain it, although without him it would not have come...A new era dates from his birth, an era in which people will be lifted for a while into communion with God and spirituality become the dominant note of human life. (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, pp. 799-800)

As it has been noted before that Sri Aurobindo restored the teachings of Vedas and Upanishads to their pristine purity. In this process, he was quite critical of Shankara's philosophy of *mayavada*. His vision and philosophy incorporates the earthly life into the spiritual life. Qualifying his *Adwaita* as a more perfect synthesis than Shankara, as well stating that its preparation was done by Ramakrishna, he writes:

The word Vedanta is usually identified with strict Monoism and the peculiar theory of maya established by the lofty and ascetic intellect of Shankara. But it is the Upanishads themselves and not Shankara's writings, the text and not the commentary, that are the authoritative

Scripture of the Vedantin. Shankar's, great and temporarily satisfying as it was, is only one synthesis and interpretation of the Upanishads. There have been others in the past and which have powerfully influenced the national mind and there is no reason why there should not be a yet more perfect synthesis in the future. It is such a synthesis that embracing all life and action in its scope that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda have been preparing. (Sri Aurobindo, 1972, p. 344)

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